

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EUR-12 NEA-11 IO-13 HA-05 PC-01
AID-05 OMB-01 OC-06 CCO-00 TRSE-00 ACDA-12 SY-05
A-01 OPR-02 ARA-10 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
ICA-11 MCT-01 CA-01 /150 W
-----095836 241353Z /46

R 231451Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8493
INFO USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER
COMIDEASTFOR
AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 2325

DEPT PASS HORN OF AFRICA COLLECTIVE

NAIROBI FOR MATHERON

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, ET
SUBJECT: SITUATION IN ERITREA

REF: ADDIS ABABA 2297 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: INDEPENDENT SOURCES REAFFIRMED ETHIOPIA HAS
NOT LAUNCHED MAJOR OFFENSIVE IN ERITREA, ALTHOUGH AIR
ACTIVITY IS QUITE HEAVY. ETHIOPIAN GARRISON AT BARENTU
MAY BE IN TROUBLE AS ERITREAN LIBERATION FRONT (ELF)
AND ERITREAN POPULAR LIBERATION FRONT (EPLF) APPARENTLY
BEGIN TO COORDINATE THEIR MILITARY OPERATIONS ONCE
AGAIN. END SUMMARY.

1. FRENCH MILATT TOLD EMBOFF THAT HE DID NOT BELIEVE
MAJOR OFFENSIVE HAD BEGUN IN ERITREA. HE NOTED THAT
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AERIAL BOMBARDMENT HAD INCREASED SIGNIFICANTLY PAST 2
WEEKS AND ETHIOPIANS HAD AUGMENTED NUMBER OF MIG-21
AIRCRAFT BASED IN "NORTH." HE THOUGHT AIRFIELD AT
MAKELLE WAS NOW CAPABLE OF HANDLING MIG AIRCRAFT
AND THAT SOME OF AIR SORTIES WERE BEING FLOWN FROM
THERE INTO ERITREA. HE SAID THAT HIS INFORMATION
DID NOT REPEAT NOT INDICATE CUBAN PILOTS WERE FLY-

ING MISSIONS IN ERITREA.

2. MILATT CLAIMED HEAVY FIGHTING WAS CONTINUING AROUND BARENTU, IN WESTERN ERITREA, AND THAT AIRFIELD COULD NO LONGER BE USED FOR RESUMPLY OF ETHIOPIAN GARRISON. HE STATED THAT AIRDROPS WERE BECOMING VERY DIFFICULT AND THAT EVEN HELICOPTERS COULD NOT LAND AT BARENTU. HE HAD HEARD ONE REPORT FROM MAY 8 THAT ETHIOPIAN CASUALTIES WERE 250 KILLED AND 400 WOUNDED DURING FIRST WEEK OF MAY IN BARENTU. HE SENSED ELF AND EPLF WERE COORDINATING THEIR MILITARY ACTIVITIES AT LEAST, IF NOT THEIR POLITICAL ONES.

3. DURING BREIF STOPOVER IN ADDIS ON RETURN FROM KHARTOUM TO NAIROBI, WESTERN CORRESPONDENT TELEPHONED EMBOFF TO BRIEF LATTER ON HIS CONVERSATIONS WITH ERITREAN GUERRILLAS IN KHARTOUM. JOURNALIST STATED THAT ERITREANS CLAIMED ETHIOPIANS WERE SHELLING RED SEA TOWNS OF THIO AND EDD FROM SHIPS, INDICATING THAT THEY HAD COME UNDER ERITREAN CONTROL. GUERRILLAS ALLEGED THAT ETHIOPIANS HAD ATTEMPTED TO BREAK SEIGE OF ASMARA PAST WEEK, HAD SOME INITIAL SUCCESS, BUT NOW HAD BEEN DRIVEN BACK TO WESTERN OUTSKIRTS OF ASMARA. THEY CONFIRMED AIR SORTIES WERE HEAVY THROUGHOUT ERITREA, SPECIALLY ALONG

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SUDAN BORDER, AROUND ASMARA AND MASSAWA. JOURNALIST ALSO BELIEVED MILITARY COORDINATION AMONG SECESSIONISTS HAD IMPROVED BUT THAT POLITICAL UNIFICATION WAS STILL FAR IN DISTANCE.

4. DESPITE EFFORT TO EAST ENCIRCLEMENT OF ASMARA FROM WITHIN, ETHIOPIAN SOURCE OF UNEVEN RELIABILITY CLAIMED THAT ETHIOPIAN STRATEGY IN ERITREA IS TO ENCIRCLE GUERRILLAS FROM GONDAR AND TIGRE REGIONS, AND ALONG SUDAN FRONTIER AND THEN TO TIGHTEN CIRCLE TO TRAP GUERRILLAS INSIDE. SOURCE DID NOT BELIEVE ETHIOPIANS HAD BEGUN TO EXECUTE THIS PLAN YET, BUT THEY WERE MAKING LOGISTICAL PREPARATIONS TO DO SO. WALKER

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